

Message Text

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53

ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 IO-14 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

COME-00 EB-11 LAB-06 SIL-01 DOTE-00 TRSE-00 OPR-02

DRC-01 /136 W

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O R 081600Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1356

AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

ANCONSUL MADRAS 0547

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE NEW DELHI 6166

PARIS PASS TO AMBASSADOR MOYNIHAN

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, IN

SUBJECT: NATIONAL RAILWAY STRIKE

REFS: A. NEW DELHI 5934 B. NEW DELHI 5812 (NOTAL)

BEGIN SUMMARY: NATIONAL RAIL STRIKE THREATENED FOR MAY 8
WENT INTO EFFECT AS SCHEDULED. WHILE ONE OF THE TWO
RECOGNIZED MAJOR RAILWAY FEDERATIONS, THE CONGRESS-ALIGNED
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NFIR OPPOSES STRIKE AND CALLED ON RAILWAYMEN TO CONTINUE

WORK, DISRUPTION IS NATIONWIDE. GOI HAS PUT INTO EFFECT LONGSTANDING PREPARATIONS TO BREAK STRIKE AND MAINTAIN ESSENTIAL RAIL SERVICES USING MILITARY, POLICE, AND "LOYAL" WORKERS. AT THIS POINT, SHORT OF LARGE-SCALE RETURN TO WORK IN THE NEXT WEEK OR TWO, EFFECTIVENESS OF RAIL SYSTEM TO PROVIDE FOR MINIMUM NATIONAL NEEDS IS DOUBTFUL. END SUMMARY.

1. AS SCHEDULED, THE NATIONAL COORDINATION COMMITTEE FOR RAILWAYMEN'S STRUGGLE (NCCRS) CARRIED OUT ITS THREAT TO STRIKE AT 0600 HOURS MAY 8. THE STRIKE WHICH IN EFFECT BEGAN PIECEMEAL MAY 3, IN SPONTANEOUS PROTEST REACTIONS TO THE SUDDEN MASS ARRESTS OF RAILWAY LABOR LEADERS MAY 2 WHILE NEGOTIATIONS WERE IN PROGRESS, IS NOT TOTAL, BUT IT HAS RESULTED IN NATIONAL DISRUPTION OF THE RAIL SYSTEM. THE CONGRESS PARTY-ALIGNED NATIONAL FEDERATION OF INDIAN RAILWAYMEN(NFIR), AN ASSOCIATE FEDERATION OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL TRADE UNION CONGRESS (INTUC), IS OPPOSING THE STRIKE. ITS PRESIDENT, A P SHARME, (ALSO A DEPUTY LEADER OF THE CONGRESS PARLIAMENTARY PARTY) HAS CALLED ON ALL RAILWAYMEN TO CONTINUE TO WORK. NOTWITHSTANDING THE NFIR AND THE GOI(S PREPARATIONS TO BREAK THE STRIKE AND MAINTAIN THE ESSENTIAL SERVICES, THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE RAIL SYSTEM TO PROVIDE FOR MINIMUM NATIONAL NEEDS SHORT OF A LARGE-SCALE RETURN TO WORK IN THE NEXT WEEK OF TWO, IS DOUBTFUL.

2. AT THIS POINT RAILWAY SERVICES TO ALL MAJOR URBAN AND INDUSTRIAL CENTERS (INCLUDING BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, AND MADRAS) APPEAR TO BE CRIPPLED, WITH THE RAILWAY MANAGEMENT ATTEMPTING TO MAINTAIN SKELETON SERVICES, USING THE MILITARY, POLICE, AND "LOYAL" WORKERS. THE GOI HAS ANNOUNCED SEVERE RESTRICTIONS ON MAIL DELIVERIES. FOOD SUPPLIES WITHIN THE COUNTRY ARE LIMITED AND MAJOR DISRUPTION OF RAIL MOVEMENTS COULD CAUSE SERIOUS FOOD SHORTAGES IN MOST URBAN CENTERS WITHIN ONE TO TWO WEEKS. GIVEN PRESENT STOCKS AND PLANNED HIGH PRIORITY DELIVERIES OF COAL, POWER PLANTS AND STEEL MILLS MAY CONTINUE TO OPERATE, WHILE LESSER PRIORITY INDUSTRIAL PLANTS WOULD FUNCTION ONLY UNTIL CURRENT RAW MATERIAL STOCKS RUN OUT. IF STRIKERS RESORT TO EXTENSIVE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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VIOLENCE SECURITY FORCES ARE NOT LIKELY TO BE ABLE TO PROVIDE THE QUALITY OR QUANTITY OF PERSONNEL TO MAN TRAINS, GUARD RAIL INSTALLATIONS TO ASSURE MUCH SERVICE OF SAFETY. NOR IS THE SUBSTITUTION OF ROAD OR SHIP TRANSPORT LIKELY TO HAVE MUCH IMPACT.

3. THE STATE OF PLAY IS THAT MRS. GANDHI HAS THUS FAR REMAINED SILENT IN THE FACE OF APPEALS FROM TRADE UNIONS, OPPOSITION

POLITICAL PARTIES, CERTAIN ELEMENTS OF THE CONGRESS PARTY AND FROM SEVERAL STATE GOVERNMENTS, TO PERSONALLY INTERVENE TO AVERT THE STRIKE. NEGOTIATIONS THAT COLLAPSED WITH THE MASS ARRESTS OF MAY 2 REMAIN BROKEN OFF. THE UNIONS INSIST ON THE RELEASE OF THEIR LEADERS AND THE GOVERNMENT INSISTS ON THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE STRIKE NOTICE BEFORE ANY RESUMPTION OF NEGOTIATIONS. THE GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO PURSUE EFFORTS TO BREAK THE STRIKE, INCLUDING THE MOUNTING OF A PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN USING RADIO AND TELEVISION. GEORGE FERNANDES, THE MOST PROMINENT OF THE STRIKE LEADERS, REMAINS IN DETENTION IN DELHI, AND CONTINUES TO ISSUE STATEMENTS DECLARING HIS DESIRE FOR A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT. PRESS ESTIMATES ARRESTS NOW TOTAL FIVE TO SIX THOUSAND THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY (A FIGURE WHICH SEEMS REASONABLE).

4. TRADE UNION FEDERATIONS OF ALL POLITICAL ORIENTATIONS, EXCEPT FOR THE CONGRESS-ALIGNED INTUC, ARE SCHEDULED TO MEET TO DISCUSS POSSIBLE SYMPATHY ACTION. INDIVIDUAL UNIONS OR LOCAL LABOR FEDERATIONS OF PUBLIC SERVICE OR GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES IN SOME AREAS HAVE ALREADY EXTENDED VARIOUS FORMS OF FRATERNAL SUPPORT. THE INTUC LEADERSHIP AND SENIOR OFFICIALS OF THE NFIR, DISCIPLINED BY INTENSE CONGRESS GOVERNMENT PRESSURE TO OPPOSE THE STRIKE, ARE UNEASY AND DISTRESSED AT THE WAY THE GOVERNMENT HAS HANDLED THE SITUATION, AND PARTICULARLY, THE ADVERSE REACTION THIS COULD HAVE ON THE FOLLOWING OF CONGRESS-ALIGNED UNIONS. WITHIN THE RANKS OF THE STRIKING UNIONS, THERE IS SUSPICION OF THE AITUC-CPI COMPONENT, THE RECENTLY FORMED PAPER INDIA RAILWAY WORKERS FEDERATION (IRWF). WHILE CRITICIZING THE DETENTION OF FERNANDES AND PARTICIPATING IN THE NCCRS STRIKE DECISIONS, CPI LEADERS HAVE
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